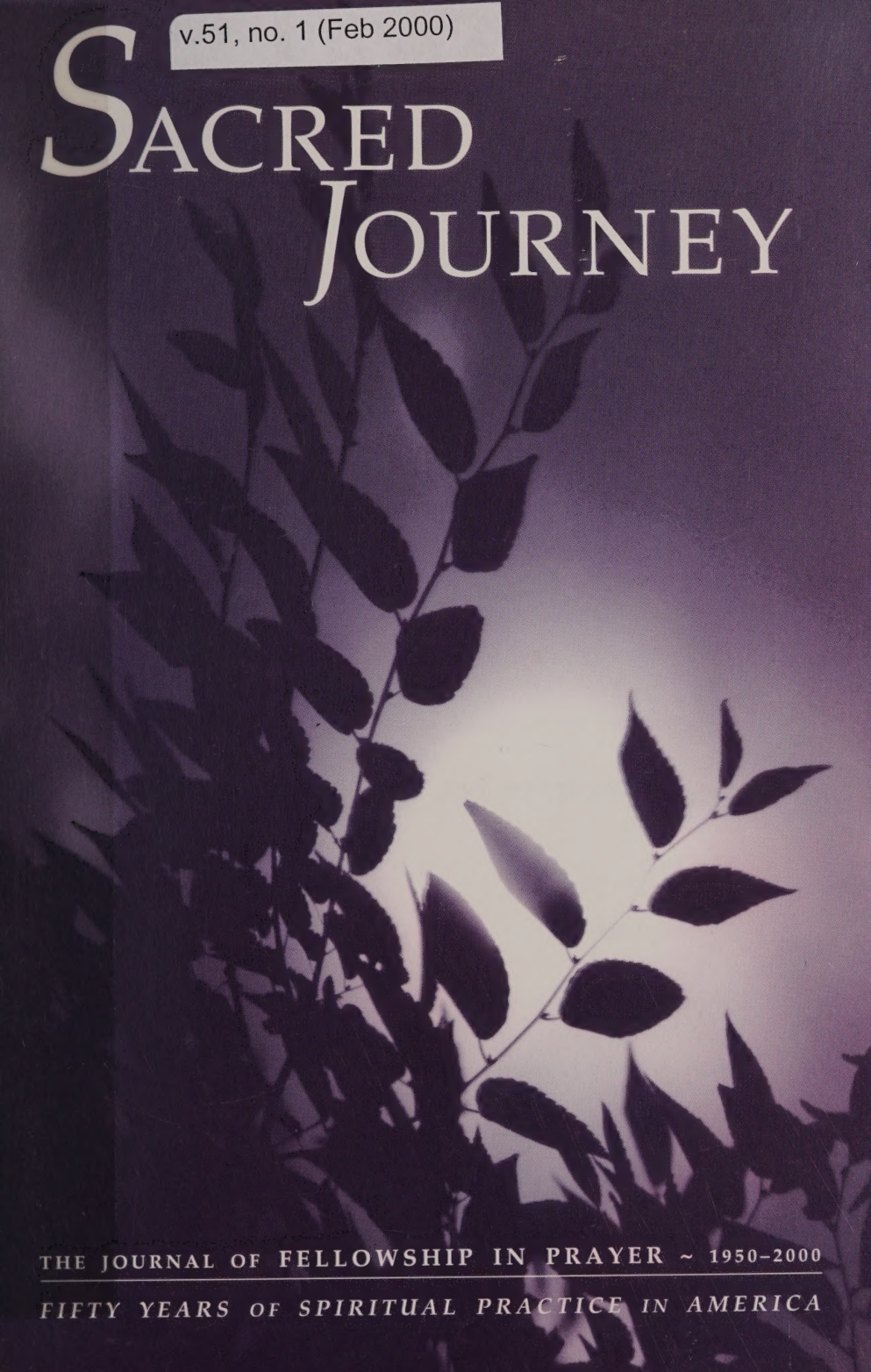


v.51, no. 1 (Feb 2000)

SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ 1950-2000

FIFTY YEARS OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE IN AMERICA

SACRED JOURNEY[®]

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

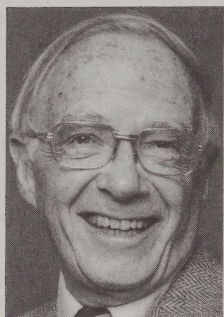
among humankind.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



Welcome to *SACRED JOURNEY'S* special 50th Anniversary issue! For half a century Fellowship in Prayer has been bringing you the personal experiences and wisdom of women and men from a wide diversity of faith traditions around the world.

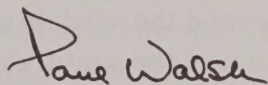
In that time span, as many of you will have noted, Americans' spiritual needs, interests, and practices have developed in many different directions. Who, what, when, and where we worship has changed considerably for many of us, and the contents of this journal have reflected those changes while remaining faithful to our mission of "promoting the practice of prayer, meditation, and service to others." Whether or not they have left the church of their childhood, many of our readers tell us that *Fellowship in Prayer/SACRED JOURNEY* articles and personal accounts of the experiences and practices of people who follow a different path—be they Buddhists, Native Americans, Hindus, Moslems, or Eastern Orthodox Christians—have enriched and nourished their own spiritual lives.

What directions will American religion and spirituality, in all its diversity, take in the next fifty years? In the next millennium? The most prescient answer I know comes from Professor Robert Wuthnow of Princeton University,

the most informed and insightful commentator on religion in America today. In the interview with him that follows, our gifted editor, Rebecca Laird, shares with us his knowledge of the changing soul of America over the course of the past fifty years and his assessment of where we're headed.

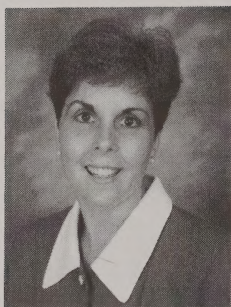
Another way to explore the riches and insights of American spirituality today is to join us at the "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference—Fellowship in Prayer's 50th Anniversary celebration in Princeton, New Jersey, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, June 16, 17, and 18, 2000. Dr. Larry Dossey, Jungian analyst Ann Ulanov and Professor Barry Ulanov, sixteen different workshops and prayer circles, music, sacred dance, labyrinth walking, and much more await you on the beautiful campus of Princeton University.

The process of praying, meditating, journeying, seeking, perceiving and experiencing that occupies so many of us in the search for our own true Self and God's, is reflected in the pages that follow. May they be of help to you on your own sacred journey.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Paul Walsh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Walsh".

Paul Walsh

FROM THE EDITOR



The dust has been flying around here as we pulled fifty years' worth of newsletters, booklets, and journals from our shelves. And what a marvelous romp through recent American spiritual history the many published pages provide. In the earliest decade, a regular newsletter carried poetry and prayers that now sound oddly formal. Soon school-like reports on the various religions of the world began introducing our original, forward-thinking readers to the variant ways people around the globe reach toward and revel in God.

By the 1960s, *Fellowship in Prayer*, now pamphlet-sized, paired the wisdom of great teachers like Evelyn Underhill, one of the century's early experts on mysticism with the writings of unheralded people of faith whose ability to capture on paper the anguished, searching spirit of the times is their lasting legacy.

Spiritual winds from the East blew across the pages of *Fellowship in Prayer* in the 1970s and 1980s reflecting the disenchantment of many with Western European ways. Articles describe the search for a sage and visits to ashrams, Zen monasteries, and Native American ceremonies. Paeans to the music of jazz great John Coltrane and the Beatles showed how popular culture

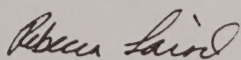
began to erase the divisions between sacred and secular. And language clearly changed. Gender-inclusive terms and less-magisterial names for the Divine became standard.

After several decades of being relegated to the outback of American public life, spirituality—broadly defined—surged into the 1990s as if it were a newly discovered fountain of vitality. All things, even immutable ones, come back into fashion again. Indeed, three years ago, after a generation of promoting prayer, meditation, and service, we gave ourselves a face lift and a name change. *SACRED JOURNEY*, as you now know our journal, seeks to bring practitioners of varied spiritual practices into your life to promote, encourage, and challenge your earnest spiritual search.

The issue you hold in your hands is retrospective. Brian Madison, our vitally needed editorial intern, culled from thousands of pages of newsletters and journals. I painfully pared the offerings down. When the sheer weight of decades and materials daunted me, I read Robert Wuthnow's book, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*. His assessment of where we've been and are now headed resonated, so I contacted him. The morning conversation I had with Dr. Wuthnow is recounted in *Questions & Answers* and will orient you as you read through the decades.

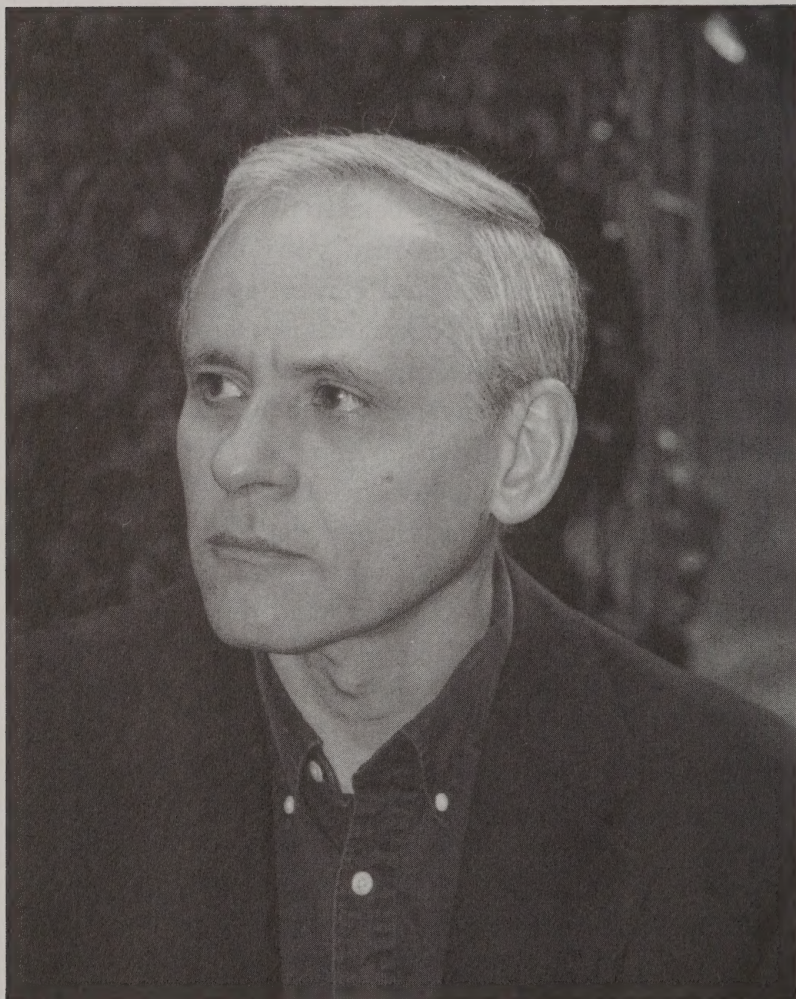
Thanks for joining *SACRED JOURNEY* at this important juncture on the journey.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Rebecca Laird". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Rebecca Laird

Robert Wuthnow



Sara Wuthnow

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Spirituality in America Since the 1950s



Robert Wuthnow

*Birthdays, even for institutions, inspire reflection. Fellowship in Prayer, the publishers of SACRED JOURNEY, was launched to call people of all religious faiths to pray for peace when fears of nuclear destruction first loomed large. Fifty years and many prayers and explorations later, we have entered a new century. Boundaries between faith communities and traditions are blurred, and we live in a society that is global, mobile, and technologically complex. For perspective SACRED JOURNEY turned to Robert Wuthnow, Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for the Study of American Religion at Princeton University. His book *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* draws upon extensive religious and cultural research and two hundred personal interviews.*

Rebecca Laird: Let's start off with a definition. Define spirituality as you explore it in *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*.

Robert Wuthnow: I define spirituality very simply as a person's relationship to God. That sometimes gets translated for people into different words. They may prefer

to talk about the transcendent, the sacred, their higher power, some realm of the mysterious, or an ultimate being.

Your book describes a spatial change in our cultural spiritual understanding during the past fifty years. We've moved from "dwelling spirituality" to "seeking spirituality." Explain this shift.

A spirituality of dwelling is one in which a spiritual habitat defines one's relationship to God. The spiritual dwelling is customary, habitual and involves engaging in practices one takes for granted. One's spiritual responsibility primarily demands showing up and God will be there. The dwelling place seems natural, comfortable and often is the religious organization or community in which one was raised. Often one's kin are part of that community. Some people we interviewed for the book talked about their neighborhoods as being Catholic neighborhoods. A person might say, "I lived in St. Rita's," and assume others understood that meant near St. Rita's Parish. Another person would identify their community as a Jewish neighborhood. People who attended a Southern Baptist church described the local church as synonymous with all of their neighbors and all of their activities.

In our own society, dwelling spirituality was most evident in the 1950s when there was a focus on home and family. The baby boomer generation was young, and the large majority of families had small children. There was also a Cold War-sense of being a beleaguered nation needing to hunker down. We put "In God We Trust" on our currency at the time.

A spirituality of dwelling draws from biblical images. There are many references to entering and being in the

temple where one feels secure with God. For example, the Twenty-third Psalm concludes with the often-quoted phrase, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The great unsettledness of society, starting in the 1960s, made us a transient population. We don't live close to our kin anymore. Our communities are large and diverse ethnically and racially. We usually work in one community, live in another, go to church, send our kids to school, and shop in others. We also have a great deal of freedom in an affluent culture like ours to shop around and to be consumers even in spiritual matters.

A spirituality of seeking is one in which we seek God in many different venues. We are not quite sure of God's address anymore, and so we feel it is appropriate to look here today and there tomorrow, and we often feel slightly uncertain about the journey itself.

The spirituality of seeking also is rooted in biblical imagery. The children of Israel wander in the wilderness and they look for God in the tabernacle, knowing that the tabernacle moves with them. There is also the image of the pilgrim in various historic and monastic writings which describe the moveable search for God.

Your study of the late 1970s and 1980s showed an increased interest in spiritual discipline. For all our seeking and striving, are we now more spiritually mature people?

In looking at the 1980s extending into the early 1990s, I was impressed with how much emphasis people began to put on stern, moral discipline. Many people who were mainline Protestants, Catholics, Jews, as well as evangelical Protestants were interested in moral discipline

and were religiously shaped by the many Protestant leaders on television who said, 'You really do need to spend some time praying, reading the Bible, going back to church, talking with your family about the right way to live and avoiding the wrong way to live.' We began to be aware that maybe we were a little too selfish as a culture. Maybe we were a little too lax on standards of behavior and were trying to do something about it but were not quite sure how to proceed. This discipline was really an attempt put the excesses of the 1960s back into the box.

One can never know in looking at a historical period what things might have been like had those movements never developed. What we do know from looking at a wide variety of evidence is that things didn't get better. Church attendance and prayer did not increase. Violent crime, teenage pregnancies, and drug use did not decrease during this time. The question arising from this time for me was: With all the popularity of, and good intentioned emphasis on spiritual discipline, why didn't we do better as a culture?

Why didn't moral discipline make a difference?

Spiritual discipline was often reduced to a set of techniques in a short book: 'Follow a few easy steps and you can change your life.' Often discipline never got beyond simplistic techniques.

In other cases, spirituality or spiritual discipline was equated with changing your attitude in order to feel happier. For some, spiritual discipline was a method of gaining guidance in an uncertain world. You could pray or read the Bible and God would help you make your decisions. But this attempt to find guidance often faltered

because God didn't suddenly appear in the night and say take this job and not that one. During this period there was more talk about spiritual discipline than action or understanding about how to put spiritual discipline into practice.

You characterize the decade of the late 1980's and early 1990's as a period of when many Americans showed heightened interest in the mysterious: angel encounters, channeling, near-death-experiences, spirit guides and miracles. Say more.

The mysterious is always on the back burner in America. In the 1990s, all across society, there was the sense that we needed to find God but weren't sure where to look. We weren't even sure God was there. As a more educated society very heavily influenced by the global communications industry, we knew that we were just a small piece of the globe and other people felt and believed differently than we did. We needed some kind of experience to reassure ourselves that God existed.

As a culture we have been schooled by a philosophical tradition of American pragmatism that tells us: Don't believe things unless you have experienced them. The personal, experiential mode of finding truth is very important to us. As this popular interest in the miraculous came about, for the first time in a long time people didn't turn to religious authorities to tell us what to think. People in effect said, 'I experienced this. Who are you to tell me that I didn't? Or who are you to give me an interpretation of what I alone experienced?' That allowed a lot of the popular interest in spirituality to be guided by the publishing and entertainment industries and by retreat

centers and conference planners rather than by the clergy.

Are our mystical experiences purely the result of our cultural conditioning? Is there nothing more to them than that?

We live in a society that teaches us to look out for ourselves and to do that at the least cost to ourselves. This cultural lesson certainly impacts our mysterious encounters. Let's use angels as an example. Our angels are very different from the ones that the mystics of the middle ages experienced. Our angels are virtually always friendly. They always do good deeds for us. Often they are young and quite attractive with long flowing hair. They are pretty much at our beck and call. They come around to protect us, and don't seem to be troubled, and we don't either, if someone else isn't protected. The typical angel story may be that I was spared a bad car accident and the person in front of me was killed. No one asks: Why didn't the angel help that person in front of me? This is an example of the kind of individualism or self-interestedness that our culture imposes on our thinking about angels.

A contemporary sociologist like myself would never say that mystical experiences or angelic encounters are only a projection of our cultural understanding. There might well be something out there trying to communicate with us; we know we see through a glass darkly.

You describe a "practice-oriented spirituality" as an alternative or recommended way of living out the sacred search. Describe this for us.

Practice-oriented spirituality takes seriously the

individual's responsibility to cultivate a relationship with God. Spiritual practice means pursuing a discipline on a daily or regular basis. It links people to a tradition since people don't invent their practices, although they may adapt them. A spiritual practice has historic roots. It has models, whether it be in the lives of the saints or the lives of personal mentors. It has a moral dimension, some constraint, and is costly in terms of time and energy. Spiritual practice is focused on individual behavior, yet at the same time, it is seldom done entirely alone. A person may pray alone on a given Tuesday morning, but is also likely to be part of a community, congregation, network, or small group that is pursuing a certain kind of spiritual discipline and offering guidance. One recognizes rules or patterns, traditions of wisdom, and teaching that one needs to follow.

Spiritual practice is more than a devotional, separate activity; it is interlaced with the rest of life and influences people's work, family relationships, and attitudes. Practice-oriented spirituality is very different from simply shopping around and being guided by momentary feelings or short-term interests. People who engage in spiritual practices often do so for years. They may experience results, they may not. They understand that the rewards are intrinsic to the actual practice. In that sense spiritual practice is a form of worship.

Are individualized, quick-result oriented Americans capable of sustaining spiritual practice?

Our culture is a strong impediment. However, in the last few months my recent survey research indicates there may be as many as a quarter of the public who, by their

own indications, are extremely interested in growing their spiritual life and who claim to devote a great deal of effort to pray or meditate regularly. Their lives seem shaped by their spiritual practice. This strong influence in the culture can make an enormous difference. People who practice their spirituality provide a spillover benefit for the culture.

What spiritual practices help you sustain your commitments and find meaning in your life?

Spiritual practice for me is a struggle. I struggle with prayer and meditation. I reflect on God as I ride down the road. I struggle with feeling close to God during the liturgy on Sunday. I struggle to be mindful of God's presence in the rest of life, in my work, or in my family relationships, or just in my leisure time. I guess for that reason, I was very drawn to the statement from Brother David Steindl-Rast that I quoted at the end of *After Heaven*: "We must avoid putting too much emphasis on practices, which are a means to an end. The end is practice, our whole lives as practice." The goal of spiritual practice is not the practice itself but to have a relationship with God infused throughout life, so that it is part of one's joy, part of one's sadness, and for that matter, part of one's boredom. It is just part of one's fabric of being.

A Call To Prayer

Clinton Scollard

"Let us put by some hour of every day
For holy things!—Whether it be when dawn
Peers through the window pane, or when the noon
Flames, like a burnished topaz, in the vault.
Or when the thrush pours in the ear of eve
Its plaintive monody: Some little hour
Wherein to hold rapt converse with the soul,
From sordidness and self a sanctuary,
Swept by the winnowing of unseen wings,
And touched by the White Light Ineffable."



The Rope of Faith



Mildred Seydell

Looking out from my New York hotel room, I see a man washing windows. I marvel—the daring and the courage of him! A sheer drop of three hundred feet to the ground from the narrow ledge where he moves. Yet, tranquilly he dips his rag into a bucket. Under his hand dull panes brighten, catch the sunlight, reflect it.

How can he do it! Danger lurking at his feet, yet he sings—he works—he is happy.

Then I see the explanation for his bravery. To each side of his belt, scarcely visible, is fastened a black rope whose ends are attached securely to the sides of the window frame. As long as the rope holds he cannot fall!

Around me men and women close to calamity, to sickness, to death, balancing themselves on one of life's precipices, yet going about their daily tasks, smiling. Perplexed, I have watched them, and have discovered that it was the rope of faith, faith in God, in Goodness, which made them feel safe.

Perhaps today you must take some hazardous step. You cannot turn back—it is your duty. Then fasten on tightly that rope of faith, with its blessed protection, and feeling its pull, go about your work cheerily.

God Educates Us Through Others



Evelyn Underhill

Every religion looks for, and most have possessed, some revealer of the Spirit; some Prophet, Buddha, or Messiah. In all, the characteristic demonstrations of human power of transcendence—a supernatural life which can be lived by us—have begun in one person, who has become a creative center, mediating new life to his fellow men: as were Buddha and Mohammed for the faiths which they founded. Such lives as those of St. Paul, St. Francis, George Fox, John Wesley, William Booth are outstanding examples of the operation of this law. The parable of the leaven is in fact an exact description of the way in which the spiritual consciousness—the supernatural urge—is observed to spread in human society.

It is characteristic of the regenerate type that he should, as it were, overflow his own boundaries and energize other souls: for the gift of a real and harmonized life pours out inevitably from those who possess it to other men. We notice that the great mystics recognize again and again

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) remains one of the twentieth century's foremost writers on mysticism.

such a fertilizing and creative power as a mark of the soul's full vitality. It is not the personal rapture of the spiritual marriage but rather the divine fecundity of one who is a parent of spiritual children, which seems to them the goal of human transcendence, and evidence of a life truly lived on eternal levels, in real union with God. "The last perfection to supervene upon a thing," says Aquinas, "is its becoming the cause of other things." In a word, it is creative. And the spiritual life as we see it in history is thus creative: the cause of other things.

History is full of examples of this law: that the man or woman of the Spirit is, fundamentally, a lifegiver; and all corporate achievement of the life of the Spirit flows from some great apostle or initiator, is the fruit of discipleship. Such corporate achievement is a form of group consciousness brought into being through the power and attraction of a fully harmonized life, infecting

*One
loving
spirit sets
another
on fire.*

others with its own sharp sense of Divine reality.

Poets and artists thus infect in a measure all those who yield to the influence. The active mystic, who is the poet of Eternal Life, does it in a supreme degree. Such a relation of master and disciples is conspicuous in every true spiritual revival, and is the link between the personal and corporate aspects of regeneration. We see it in the little flock that followed Christ, the Little Poor Men who followed Francis, the Friends of Fox (the Quakers), the army of General Booth (co-founder of the Salvation Army). Not Christianity alone, but Hindu and Moslem history testify to this necessity. The Hindu who is drawn to the spiritual life must find a *guru* who can not only teach its laws but also give its atmosphere; and must accept his discipline

in a spirit of obedience. The Sufi neophyte is directed to place himself in the hands of his *sheikh* as 'a corpse in the hands of the washer,' and all real saints of Islam have been the inspiring centers of more or less organized groups.

History teaches us, in fact, that God most often educates men through men. We most easily recognize Spirit when it is perceived transfiguring human character, and most easily achieve it by means of sympathetic contagion. Though the new light may flash, as it seems, directly into the soul of the specially gifted or the inspired, this spontaneous out-breaking is comparatively rare: and even here, careful analysis will generally reveal the extent in which environment, tradition, teaching literary or oral, have prepared the way for it.

There is no aptitude so great that it can afford to dispense with human experience and education. Even the noblest of the sons and daughters of God are also the sons and daughters of the race; and are helped by those who go before them. And as regards the generality of men, not isolated effort but the love and sincerity of the true spiritual teacher—and every man and woman of the Spirit is such a teacher within his own sphere of influence—and the unselfconscious trust of the disciple, are the means by which the secret of full life has been handed on. "One loving spirit," said St. Augustine, "sets another on fire," and expressed in this phrase the law which governs the spirit of man.

The Prayer Circle



Elizabeth Searle Lamb

Have you ever stood in a quiet twilight and thrown a pebble into the still waters of an icy mountain lake? Have you watched as the pebble produced its first circle, then another and another? A prayer should be like that pebble, producing its first reaction in your own soul, in the innermost recesses of your mind and heart, and then gradually widening its effect until it embraces all earth and heaven.

In the stillness of your mind, begin your prayer. Bless your body; let the healing forces flow freely through every cell of it, raising it surely, steadily to perfection. Make no attempt to heal specific ills; rather see the oneness, the wholeness of your body. Be not ashamed of your body. Be proud of it! Let it radiate the glory of its perfection.

Widen the circle of your prayer to include those nearest to you in spirit—family, friends, home, and work. See all filled with joy, see them prospering in the things of earth and the things of heaven. Feel your oneness with those you love who physically are far away. Place them fearlessly and freely in God's care, knowing them to be guarded, upheld, and divinely led by the same Spirit that leads you



Robert F. Campbell

into still waters of peace. Bless your home and your work with the harmony and divine efficiency of Spirit.

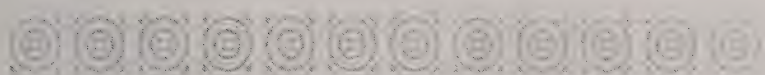
Your prayer circle will grow as you include every acquaintance in your blessing, knowing for each that there is only one presence and one power, that each is a perfect expression of the one great God force. Let this harmonizing flow of spirit free your mind from every trace of prejudice, faultfinding, of resentment.

Bless the land where you live. See the great spirit of divine wisdom, justice, and love hovering over it to protect and guide it. Know that those who lead and govern are divinely inspired, that they are strengthened so that they may bear their responsibilities easily, know that they are guided in making every decision.

Finally the circle of your prayer will widen until it has no conscious limits. The spirit of the one Mind, God, spreads over the whole world. Peace and love are the only realities. Every intolerance must go. There is no room for evil, for untruth, when this great force for good reaches out and out through a prayer begun in a human heart.

The circle of good animated through your prayer does not stop, but reaches on, spreads ever wider, in every direction until it embraces all earth and heaven.

P R A Y E R S



The Prayer of Sioux Yellow Lark

O Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds, and whose breath gives light to all the world, hear me. I come before You, one of Your many children. I am small and weak. I need your strength and wisdom. Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset. Make my hands respect the things You have made, my ears sharp to hear Your voice. Make me wise, so I may know the things You have taught my people, the lessons You have hidden in every leaf and rock. I seek strength not to be superior to my brothers, but to be able to fight my greatest enemy—myself. Make me ever ready to come to You with clean hands and straight eyes, so when life fades as a fading sunset, my spirit may come to You without shame.

Diversity

In that which we share,
let us see the common prayer of humanity.
In that in which we differ,
let us wonder at the freedom of humankind.

Jewish Prayer

Afterthoughts on a Napalm-Drop on Jungle Villages Near Haiphong



Barbara Beidler

All was still.
The sun rose through silver pine boughs,
Over sleeping green-straw huts,
Over cool rice ponds,
Through the emerald jungles,
Into the sky.

The men rose and went out to the fields and ponds.
The women set pots on the fire, boiling rice and
jungle berries, some with baskets went for fish.
The children played in the streams and danced through
the weeds.

Then there was the flash—silver and gold
Silver and gold,
Silver birds flying,
Golden water raining.
The rice ponds blazed with the new water.
The jungle burst into gold and sent up little birds of fire.
Little animals with fur of flame.

Then the children flamed.
Running—their clothes flying like fiery kites.
Screaming—their screams dying as their faces seared.
The women's baskets burned on their heads.
The men's boats blazed on the rice waters.
Then the rains came.
A rag, fire black, fluttered.
A curl of smoke rose from a lone rice stem.
The forest lay singed, seared.
A hut crumbled.

And all was still.

Listen, Americans,
Listen, clear and long.
The children are screaming
In the jungles of Haiphong.



Dr. Kenneth Hoffman/Seton Hall University

The Choice of the Sage



Mark Halpern

One of the Poet-Sages of old India happened to be passing through a town that boasted of its young poets. It was on a day of an important religious festival, at which the poets were to recite their own verses. Asked to preside as judge and thus help the elders determine who was the most gifted of their young men in the art of poesy, the old sage consented.

With his habitual gracious kindness and deep understanding, he allowed himself to be led into the court of the temple, where many were assembled to hear the fervent outpourings of verses from the hearts of the young poets.

Seating himself humble among the others, he listened as one by one of the poets intoned their devotional verses of prayer to God. When the last had concluded, the venerable old sage fixed his gaze on a young man who had been sitting among the contesting poets but had not risen to recite.

"And thou, O silent one," prompted the sage, "hast thou no verses to intone?"

The young man shook his head. But his dark eyes were proud and happy as they watched one of the poets sitting beside him.

"Tis not I who am a poet," he replied, "but my brother here. He is the poet in the family."

The sage nodded slowly, the wisdom of his deep-set eyes shining vividly, as though he already knew the information he was eliciting. "And what art *thou* in the family?" he questioned.

"I , O great sage," the young man said, "am not a poet. I help with the ordinary duties at home. I came here merely to witness the contest."

The sage smiled. "And thou has discharged those duties without a word of complaint. Is it not true that for some years now, since the passing on of thy father, thou hast provided food and shelter for thy mother and young sisters and thy poet brother, working hard at the bustling market place from morning to night; and also laboring in the evening hours before retiring for a few hours of sleep, using thy spare time in producing pottery to add to thine income?"

Then, after a pause in which the light of those knowing eyes seemed to glow with clairvoyant brilliance: "But is it not also true that thou thyself once dreamt of becoming a great poet?"

The young man looked with startled eyes at the old sage. He opened his mouth as though to reply, then brought his lips together tightly.

Slowly the venerable Poet-Sage got to his feet and addressed those present:

"The young poets I have heard recite are all worthy of the high name of poet. But the greatest among them, the true poet of all, is this young man who sacrificed his own desires and aspirations toward that lofty calling so that his brother might attain it. For, through the nobility of his Selfless Love, he has created a living Poem of his own life. And it is only such creators of living Poems who are the true poets of life."

Gandhi on Prayer



Herrymon Maurer

Into a world lighted by truth, fed by it, kept alive by it, but yet ignorant of it, there came a man who sought it, felt it, and declared it. Truth is of God, and it is God. It is that which all persons seek without knowing fully why they seek it. Men and women often forget it until it grows within one of themselves. This man, whom people called Mahatma, the Great Soul, lived so that men and women could know that there is a power more real than the power of money or weapons or prisons, and that through it the ancient chains of violence and oppression and deceit can finally be broken.

Many persons saw Gandhi and were moved by him, but the world of convention did not see him. For the world struck him with blows, cast him into prison, betrayed him with bloodshed, killed him, and after his death sought to speak ill of him. . . . Measured against perfection, even great souls fall short. Gandhi's greatness is not that he achieved the ultimate of Truth, but that he grew in it and showed others how to grow.

Herrymon Maurer, a Quaker and magazine editor, was a trustee of Fellowship in Prayer for many years. The Way of Ways/TAO, his translation and commentary on the Tao Teh Ching was published as a special expanded issue of the journal in July 1982.

The Experience of Prayer

At his meetings for worship and his meetings for prayer, there was always silence and there was always singing. There were the chants of the Hindus and the hymns of the Christians. At regular hours there were the calls to Moslem worship. Very often someone read one of Gandhi's favorite verses: "God the ruler pervades all there is in this universe. Therefore renounce and dedicate all to Him, and then enjoy that portion that may fall to thy lot."

He taught that prayer was "a longing of the soul." This prayer was spoken daily: "Lead me from untruth to Truth. Lead me from darkness to light. Lead me from death to immortality."

He would not be rigid in his worship, for he said, "Our whole life is a prayer, and therefore we need not sit down at any particular hour to pray."

The Experience of Truth

Out of prayer rose his experience of Truth, and he said, "Religion is not a thing alien to us; it has to be evolved out of us. It is always within us, with some consciously, with others quite unconsciously. And whether we worship this religious instinct through mental assistance or inward growth, no matter how it is done, it has got to be done if we want to do anything in the right manner or to achieve anything that is going to persist."

Gandhi said, "Each one has to find his peace from within. And peace, to be real, must be unaffected by outside circumstances." He said, "God needs no personal service. He serves his creatures without demanding any service for Himself in return. He is unique in this as in many other things. Therefore the servants of God are to be known by the service they render to his creatures. . . ."

His teaching of Truth was not set down in a block of words, nor was it spoken in a series of sermons. Gandhi went walking through towns and villages and cities, talking about practical matters of poverty and prejudice and giving straws of experience and wisps of thought, which fell by themselves into a single message and into one Truth. This is the essence of what he was heard to say:

“ . . . If we are, God is. . . . If God is not, we are not.”

He reported: “I do simply perceive that whilst everything is ever-changing, ever-dying, there is underlying all that change a living Power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves, and re-creates. That in-forming Power or Spirit is God, and since nothing else that I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is.

“And is this power benevolent or malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent. For I can see that in the midst of death, life persists; in the midst of untruth, truth persists; in the midst of darkness, light persists.”

Gandhi spoke to the people of India, saying, “To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness; God is the source of Light and Life, and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless heart God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves. He does not take us at our word, for He knows that we often do not mean it, some knowingly and others unknowingly.

“God is personal to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us. . . .”

"Worship and prayer, therefore, are not to be performed with the lips but with the heart. That is why they can be performed equally by the dumb and stammerer, by the ignorant and stupid; and the prayers of those whose tongues are nectared, but whose hearts are full of poison, are never heard."

He spoke not of any single religion but of all Truth. He said, "The answer to my prayer is clear and empathetic, that God is not encased in a safe to be approached through a little hole bored in it, but that He is open to be approached through millions of openings. . . ."

Gandhi saw evil as sharply as he saw good, and he saw it where it is, in each individual person. He said: "I know, too, that I shall never know God if I do not wrestle with and against evil, even at the cost of life itself. . . . How much more should I be near Him when my faith is not a mere apology, as it is today, but has become as immovable as the Himalayas and as white as the snows on their peaks?"

Truth and Non-Violence

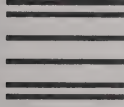
Believing truthful things, Gandhi used the same things to fight against evil. He said, "The only way love punishes is by suffering." He said also, "There is only one fundamental Truth, which is Truth itself, otherwise known as non-violence I discovered in the earliest stages that pursuit of Truth did not admit of violence being inflicted upon one's opponent, but that he must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy."

For what good is it to hurt evil men? Truth is in all men, making them one, and not in a few of them, making them separate. To do hurt to any man is to do hurt to oneself, for to injure him is to injure Truth and thus to

hurt the whole world. Nor is there good in forcing a man toward outward goodness by fear of injury, for evil is not only what men make other men suffer but what men think within themselves. "A man who broods on evil," Gandhi wrote, "is as bad as a man who does evil, if he is no worse." Therefore when violence is fought with violence it begets greater violence. Evil grows and man is cast into slavery. Gandhi said, ". . . the light within me is steady and clear. There is no escape for any of us save through Truth and non-violence."

"Whether mankind will consciously follow the law of love," Gandhi said, "I do not know. But that need not disturb us. The law will work just as the law of gravitation works, whether we accept it or not. The man who discovered for us the law of love was a far greater scientist than any of our modern scientists. Only our explorations have not gone far enough and so it is not possible for everyone to see all its workings."

Gandhi lived that he might make these explorations. When he saw injustice, he would not work with it. When he saw untruth, he would not stay beside it. But he would suffer against evil, sacrifice himself against injustice, and die against untruth. The Truth he loved was his weapon against what he hated. This was his explanation, his discovery, his teacher, and his prayer.

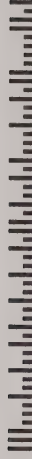


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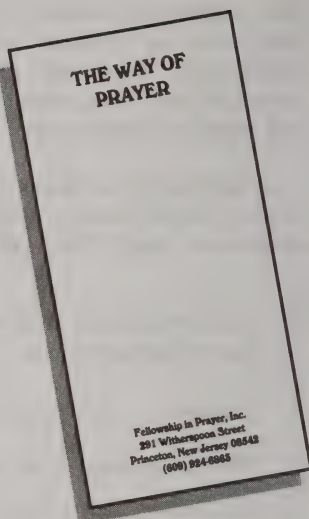
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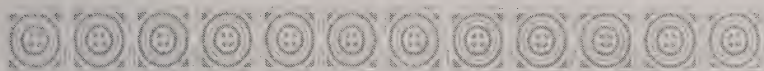
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ILLUMINATIONS



The search after truth, however important though it be, is not the whole aim and end of life. The truth is no dead thing, to be placed in a museum when found—to be labeled, classified, cataloged, exhibited, and left there, dry and sterile. It is something vital which must take root in our lives ere we reap the full reward of our search.

-Baha'u llah

God is not a continent, like Antarctica, lying off somewhere, inert, without relation to human life till some Scott or Amundsen or Byrd finds him. God is not mountain peak to which travelers must go and which they climb step by step. God is like the air we breathe or the earth beneath our feet. To discover him is simply to awaken to reality. It is like a plant discovering the sun and the rain that drew it from the earth or like children discovering the parents who gave them birth and love and nurture.

~Luther A. Weigle

Learn as if you were to live forever, live as if you were to die tomorrow.

~Mohandas Gandhi

Absolute attention is prayer.

~Simone Weil

Strange is our situation here upon earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: That man is here for the sake of other men . . . for the countless unknown

souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy. Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received and am still receiving.

~Albert Einstein

Concepts create idols.
Only wonder comprehends anything.

~Gregory of Nyssa

If a pane of glass could understand the light that fills it and into which it disappears, it would be exactly like the soul of the contemplative who wakes up to the reality of God, to the touch of . . . understanding. For the contemplative understands God by the experience of being saturated in the Light, which is . . . Truth itself poured directly into the soul.

~Thomas Merton

How can we ever be the sold-short or cheated, we who for every service have long ago been overpaid?

~Meister Eckhart

Kindness in words creates confidence; kindness in thinking creates depth; kindness in giving creates love.

~Taoist saying

This we know. The earth does not belong to humanity—humanity belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. We did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

~Chief Seattle

Prayer Wheel



Francis Merchant

A tourist visiting a monastery in Asia came upon a prayer wheel. It contained a compartment where a sheaf of papers was stored—papers on which prayers were written.

The tourist turned the wheel several times, and then stood there in perplexed reflection.

A monk who had watched him observantly walked over and started a conversation.

"I noticed that you seemed perplexed," the monk commented.

"You observed correctly," the tourist admitted. "It seems very odd to me that the mechanical turning of this wheel should be classified as praying. I don't even know what's written on the sheaf of papers I have been rotating. I find this practice very questionable."

"Does the turning of the wheel suggest anything else to you?" the monk probed.

"I don't know that it does," the tourist frankly confessed.

Francis Merchant, a trustee and frequent contributor to Fellowship in Prayer, served several universities as a professor of English. Two volumes of his "Arcane Stories" were published posthumously by Fellowship in Prayer in 1981 and 1982.

"Are there not wheels within yourself as well as outside?" the monk suggested.

"I hadn't thought of that," the tourist acknowledged.

"Many men turn the wheel of ambition for a lifetime," the monk observed. "We are more concerned with the wheel of aspiration."

"You cast an entirely different light on the subject."

"We seek to turn the wheel of compassion daily and hourly. As a cart is drawn by wheels, so are our lives directed by the wheels of thought, meditation, and reasonableness. They will not

turn themselves, but must be set in motion by a deliberate act of the will. Our very destiny is dependent on the wheels that we set awlirl within ourselves."

"Are you saying that the prayer wheel is really a symbol, a reminder of the inner wheels that every man ought to set in motion?"

"Rightly have you understood," the monk nodded.



Religion News Service

What is Meditation & Why Meditate?



Paul Walsh

Today, increasing numbers of Americans are turning to meditation. Some have very practical reasons: to reduce the effects of stress and anxiety, to learn how to relax, to become more centered, to improve their physical well-being or their psychological and emotional stability. These are all sound reasons, and many meditators achieve the results they are looking for.

Others, suffering from feelings of emptiness and lack of meaning in their lives, hope to come to know God through meditation—through direct experience to reach a state of conscious union with the ultimate reality and divine dimension of the universe.

Not infrequently, the person who starts meditating for purely practical reasons becomes, as a result of his or her practice, increasingly sensitive to spiritual values, increasingly aware of unity with all of nature as well as with all of humanity. A transformation of consciousness is experienced that radically alters his worldly and material values, and his relationship with himself, with others, and with the universe.

Paul Walsh is the President of Fellowship in Prayer.

How to Meditate

Meditation techniques vary from the highly complex and esoteric visualizations and techniques of some Buddhist and Yoga Schools to Transcendental Meditation's simple technique of sitting quietly in a chair for twenty minutes and reciting a mantra. Dervishes (Sufis) spin in a circle and chant. Yogis may stare fixedly at a candle flame. Tibetan Buddhists visualize mandalas (a circular form, or diagram, employed for the focusing of cosmic and psychic energies). Zen students count their breaths or concentrate on a koan. Christians may focus their attention on a crucifix, or repetitively recite, "Jesus have mercy on me."

All these techniques have in common the objective of tuning out not only the distracting sights and sounds of the external world, but all mental activity as well. They are designed to center the meditator and ready him or her for the descent into the deeper, non-verbal, non-rational, imageless layers of consciousness where true meditation takes place.

The description of how to sit in meditation given by the Japanese Master Dogen in 1227, is still the basic model used by most meditators today: "For *zazen*, a quiet room is suitable. Eat and drink moderately. Cast aside all involvements and cease all affairs. Do not think good or bad. Do not administer pros and cons. Cease all movements of the conscious mind, the gauging of all thoughts and views. Have no desire on becoming a Buddha.

"At the site of your regular sitting, spread out thick matting and place a cushion above it. Sit either in the full-lotus or half-lotus position. Then place your right hand on your left leg and your left palm (facing upwards) on your right palm, thumb-tips touching. Thus sit upright in

correct bodily posture, neither inclining to the left nor to the right, neither leaning forward nor backward. Be sure your eyes are on a plane with your shoulders and your nose in line with your navel. Place your tongue against the front roof of your mouth, with teeth and lips both shut. Your eyes should always remain open, and you should breathe gently through your nose.

“Once you have adjusted your posture, take a deep breath, inhale and exhale, rock your body right and left, and settle into a steady, immobile sitting position.”

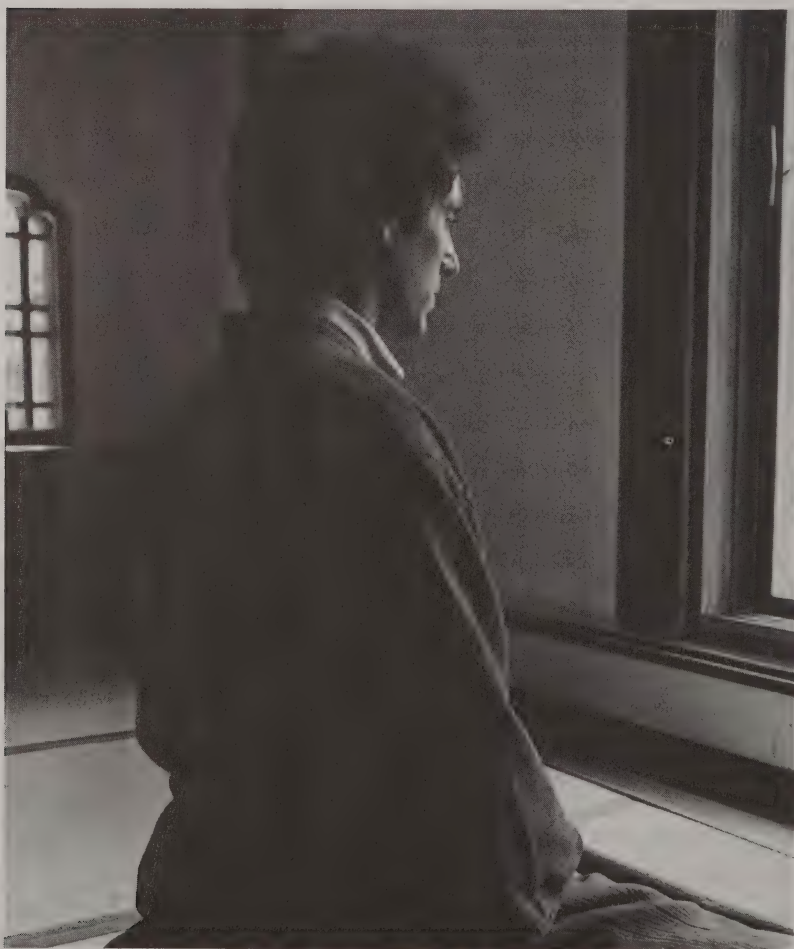
What one does for the next half hour or so depends on one’s practice. Basically, you attempt to sit silently and motionlessly while concentrating your full attention on whatever focus of awareness (your breathing, your mantra, your prayer) you have chosen. When passing thoughts or images capture your attention, you gently but firmly return your attention to the object of meditation (Advanced students may be able to dispense with such aids to concentration and simply sit—at one with existence itself.)

In Zen meditation, each session of sitting lasts from thirty-five to forty-five minutes, alternating with ten minute periods of *kinhin* (walking meditation). There may be two or more, usually three, such sessions of sitting, in an evening. Beginners are told to count their exhalations, from one to ten, then repeat the count, for the duration of the session. When they lose track of the count because their mind wanders, they go back to one. They progress to simply concentrating on their breathing, and, when ready, are assigned a koan—such as “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”—to concentrate on.

In Yoga, some of the better-known forms of meditation include sitting in one of the lotus positions and repeating a mantra (a sacred sound or phrase such as *Om Mani*

Padme Hum) or directing a steady gaze on an external object such as a candle flame, or visualizing a mandala.

Many Sufis use music and dancing to help induce ecstatic states and accelerate the contact of the Sufi's mind with the World Mind, of which he or she feels a part. Others use no extraneous aids to meditation and the experience of mystical transport aside from prayer and breathing techniques. "The science of the Sufis," wrote the Persian Sufi al-Gazali, "aims at detaching the heart



Tom Dunham

from all that is not Allah, and at giving to it as its sole occupation the meditation of the Divine Being.”

Meditation and Prayer in the West

In Western countries, particularly in monasteries, meditation as a religious or spiritual practice has been in use for centuries, especially silent, contemplative prayer. Such prayer, as distinguished from the more familiar goal-directed prayer in which we call on God for help or consolation, or offer praise or thanks, is indeed a true form of meditation. The well-known Eastern Orthodox “Prayer of the Heart” (also called “the Jesus Prayer”)—the simple repetition on each exhalation of breath, “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me”—is used to help shut out all external stimuli, empty the mind of all activity, and bring the meditator into union with God. The similarity of this practice to forms of Buddhist or Yogic meditation is clear. Prayer thus used as a way to help lead one to the depth of one’s being, where one may encounter God, or one’s True Self, is not different from meditation as we have been defining it.

How to Begin

Obviously, there is no one “right” way to meditate. Each person must somehow find the method best suited to his or her background and way of being. But how to find out? Ideally, one would like to sit down with an experienced meditation teacher or teachers, try out different techniques, and, having chosen, receive instruction or guidance on a regular basis. A handful of major cities offers such a possibility, but only a fortunate few get the opportunity to study under an authentic meditation master.

The Divine Ordination of Women



Miriam Therese Winter

The flickering candle chants its litany of light into the darkness of the tiny dwelling, declaring the whole of it sacred space. Arising slowly from the ground and from a deep, hard sleep, I pause before my icon to pray. The small square hole cut out of the canvas, my window to another world, holds a silhouette of the Ethiopian bush. How peaceful just before daybreak. Too dark to distinguish the impoverished hordes huddled in the hollows of the hillsides. Too early for the silence to be shattered by the howl of hunger and cacophony of despair. Give us this day our daily bread. Deliver us from evil. How fragile the hope that holds us hostage. Another day. Another long, hot, hard, exhausting, exasperating day. Well, better one day in your tent, O God, O suffering, saving, compassionate God, than a thousand in the security of my own home in Connecticut. It is time to celebrate the liturgy for which I was ordained. I pull on my jeans and my thick-soled shoes. God, I believe, help my unbelief. Let all that I do praise you.

M.T. Winter is Professor of Liturgy, Worship, Spirituality and Feminist Studies and Director of the Women's Leadership Institute at Hartford Seminary.

It is just after dawn and already the long brown, deathly silent line snakes all around the perimeter of our camp and loses itself in the distance. People. Lined up for food, for work, for a handout of any kind. I don't work the camp, so it's not my job to sort out, select, and send them away. Oh, some will get work and grain for their family. Several hundred perhaps. But there must be a thousand already waiting and hundreds more on the way. I drink a cup of tea and eat something "nourishing." A famine biscuit with a peanut butter spread. It hardly matters. It is an effort to swallow, seeing all those hungry people. I turn to avoid their eyes. As I move out into and through the crowds, lines part and children rush to join me in procession. Together we head toward the intensive feeding center about a mile away, reenacting the rite with the precision of routine: down to the river, across the ridge, up the long slow hill, not now in the morning sun, through elephant grass and the red clay schoolyard to the tiny compound where I will spend all my energies again in a rituals of hope and healing. A woman chanting a Muslim prayer throws herself at my feet, and another, pleading, clings to my hand. Women hold out their babies, thin little things, men shove small children into my path. People pull and push, they shout, they cry. Jesus, when you entered Jerusalem, when again and again you encountered a crowd, how did your heart survive? I enter the sanctuary, our place of prayer, to the chant of the *populi Deo*. Their lament is loud and clear. Out of the depths of my pain arises my own *miserere nobis*. Forgive

*Several
hundred
life stories
line the
thatch
walls and
cover the
mud floors.*

us, O God, our sins of insensitivity and indifference. For caring too little and possessing too much. For wasting our wealth on the trivial, while the world hangs on the cross.

The night staff comes forward to make their report. Young, inexperienced Ethiopian villagers, desperate for work, are now our trusted aides and “nurses.” It was a fairly quiet night, they say. Several fevers. Some distress. We are low on oil. We are out of sugar. There is no water for the powered mill. Why can’t we use river water? When will grain arrive from Addis? People are hungry. I know, I say. Night shift, go home and get some sleep. Biharu, Sultan, arrange the barrels and pray for rain. Tigiste, go borrow two tins of oil from the Swiss camp up the road. Now let’s dish up the 8_{A.M.} feed, then see to medications and morning rounds. The entrance rite is over. We move on to our liturgy.

Several hundred life stories line the thatch walls and cover the mud floors of the three tiny rooms on the compound. Each life is a proclamation of God’s Word, the suffering a preaching more eloquent than any I have ever heard. The broken bodies cradle a hope and a faith that never falters, I can feel the strength all around me. I distribute food and medicines, but when it comes to the intangibles, they give and I receive. This deep, unspoken dialogue gives the message of hope its meaning. All who hunger are fed. As I move slowly around the crowded little room, greeting, touching, responding to need in my awkward, limited way. I am greeted, touched, and nurtured beyond all possible anticipation by the spirit of our incarnate God.

Our intensive feeding center for emaciated children is a temporary refuge. We set it up ourselves. Mary, Carolyn, Maureen, and I. My three colleagues are nurses. I do what-



Victor Englebert/Mira

ever needs to be done. Daily, every two hours, what serves as bread is figuratively blessed, broken, and distributed under a variety of disguises: soybean porridge or hotcake; high protein biscuits; thick, sweet powdered milk laced with oil and sugar; and once in a while, God be praised, a very, very small banana. Seven times a day, I take, break, distribute, and all around give thanks, as the Author of Life restores to life those physically diminished. Seven times a day, a miracle, when fully present to the Presence, I can see the shape of grace. It is 10a.m., time once again for me to fulfill my primary daily function, presiding over a liturgy of the eucharist, presiding over the distribution of desperately needed, "daily bread." When you see a hungry person and feed that person, you are feeding me, said Jesus. I look out over the beautiful brown faces of my sis-

ters and brothers, broken bodies with unbroken spirits. This is my body, said Jesus. Amen. I say. Amen.

That was two summers ago during my sojourn in Ethiopia, but in the space my heart inhabits, time is liturgical time. An empowering past is present and that liturgical celebration never ends. I am still praying prayers of petition, still searching for reconciliation, still extending greetings of peace to a host of hostile forces, still saying, over and over, words of benediction. That liturgy is not over because it is the liturgy of life and there are lessons yet to learn. I am still learning how to discern the incarnate Word in the dailyness all around me, still learning how to pray the perfect prayer. I am still learning how to be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only.

My associates and I are very much involved in theological education, so we look for the words to make sense of the Word as a pattern for our lives. Friends in search for a spirituality seek structure and turn inward, as we trade bits and pieces of authentic religious traditions in a mix-and-match approach to holiness. Liturgists evaluate rites and rituals in the hope of preserving a moment in time when the sacred and secular intersect, but as denominational debates continue about rules, roles, and the proper place of women, women the world over, day after day, celebrate the basic rite of life: feeding, healing, nurturing. Giving birth to life and sustaining life are truly priestly functions to which women have been divinely ordained. We spend too much time on rites rising out of our own theories and experience, when catastrophic signs in the wider world tell us to turn our attention toward a more fundamental ritual, which is the liturgy of life. The Word awaiting proclamation has yet to be fully fathomed. The Bread of Life, already broken, must be distributed to all.

Already we hear, here and there, the song of the new creation.

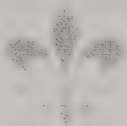
Faith moves mountains, transcending creeds.
The Word within words is embodied in deeds.
Fear for the future finds hope in the past,
for love was the first word, it's surely the last.

Mountains and meadows and free-flowing streams,
gardens and ghettos and poor people's dreams,
down through the ages, the good news is heard:
each of life's pages expresses the Word,
love that engages enfleshes the Word.

The poor will have privilege, the hungry will eat.
All of the homeless will dance in the street.
In God's revelation, real love will release
the reincarnation of justice and peace.

One day the whole earth, our holy earth, will be
caught up in a universal dance, a cosmic celebration.
One day all people, having learned how to share, will
be at ease with giving thanks. At the heart of this cosmic liturgy, of every authentic liturgy, is the God who creates and sustains all people, the God who celebrates daily the liturgy of life.

Islam—The Silent Dimension



Syed Vahiddudin

When I think of prayer, I think of it as a kind of dialogue, as a kind of communication with God. What is generally called *tawajjah* (turning one's face to God) is, I think, the greatest moment in the experience of prayer. That is to say, my attention should be directed toward God all the time. I do not conceive of prayer in terms of certain moments, in terms of certain fixed texts, in terms of certain repetitions or certain known formulas but in terms of the total attitude, in terms of my whole response to what I feel about God, in adversity, in thankfulness. Prayer for me is an uninterrupted dialogue. What is called interruption is only due to our finitude. I consider my whole existence as a kind of attunement to God.

Now, a few words about how I pray. Naturally, I have different kinds of prayer. At one time, formerly, I did not bother much about ritual prayer, especially when I was very young, in my school days. But I respect those who pray and lay great emphasis on ritual prayer because I think that in ritual prayer we participate in the history of

Dr. Syed Vahiddudin is author of Islam in India.

our community, *umma*. When I offer my *salat* (daily prayers) at fixed times which I generally do these days, I find that I have been somehow or other associated with the history of Islam and especially with the person of the Prophet. Ritual prayer forges an association with the life of the Prophet which we cannot have otherwise. And then I go for congregational prayers, although not regularly. There also I find the same collective consciousness aroused which makes me think of Islam as a kind of global, open community. This feeling of community, this feeling of participation, this awakening of historical consciousness helps me and moves me to observe ritual prayers. But I do not make a fetish out of it. If I miss one prayer, I do not feel very upset. I think that ritual prayer is part and parcel of the Islamic way of life, and no doubt if somebody feels strongly about it he or she should not miss it by any means. But that does not make me very concerned about its strict observance.

I give most emphasis to prayers in solitude, especially at night. I mean these nightly vigils: to wake up at night and to think of God and to pray and to turn toward God in my own way. Occasionally it may be through reciting Qur'anic phrases in the context of some world troubles, problems. I seek God's support in patience and prayer (Q2, 45) repeating that God is sufficient unto us, and that God is the best of protectors (Q3, 173). To think of God and to seek God's help: that gives me great consolation. I am reminded of what Hafiz says. He said that what made him what he was, were nightly vigils, to wake up at night to think of God and to cry. It is this tenderness the *Qur'an* also speaks of, mentioning those who when they read the *Qur'an* "their hearts shake and their eyes brim over with tears" (cf Q5, 83; 8, 3). This kind of tenderness is very

precious to me. Baba Farid, the Indian mystic, used to say whenever he was pleased with somebody: May God give you *soz!*; that is to say, that kind of anguish. You may be surprised that Baba Farid was praying for something which may not be very agreeable to most of us. But what is meant is that sensitivity for the unknown which is accompanied by a peculiar type of emotion which can only be characterized as a subtle agitation of mind and body.

So when I wake up early in the morning, I just think of God in whatever way I like. This thinking of God, especially at night, I think, is very useful for our spiritual development. Apart from this prayer at night, I also think of God whenever I can and wherever I am, even in society which may seem to be very worldly and have nothing to do with religion, in the theater, in the cinema or in the street. I think of God. This uninterrupted turning of my attention to God I find very heartening. It brings great spiritual elation. What impresses me most is the Qur'anic attitude when it says: "*La takhaf wa la tahzan*" (Q28,7) "Don't be afraid and don't grieve," God indeed is with us. This feeling of the proximity of God, this nearness to God, this association with God, the feeling that God never leaves me, this God's total presence, I find very characteristic of my own religious life. This is why I think of God always, not at certain periods of time only. This continuous, uninterrupted rapport with the divine is what has made me a very religious man.

Return To An Innocence



Gary Jacinto

The sun reflected silver-white on the wings of the 737. Below, spreading into the hot, brown plain of India, was New Delhi. We followed the Ganges east; the river gave no relief to the endless beige. Far away to the north a thin band of green indicated the foothills of the Terai where a pass led to a protected mountain valley and our destination, Kathmandu.

I had lived with AIDS two years and, having just turned fifty, sought a sanctuary, the Annapurna Sanctuary, an alpine meadow surrounded by 8,000-meter peaks a hundred or so miles to the west of Kathmandu and a week's hike north into the Himalaya. As the Indian sub-continent slipped silently by, I remembered a friend's joke about my "going to the mountain." I wondered how different the man who went up would be from the one who came down.

* * * * *

The taxi dropped us off at the trailhead on the new Chinese road to Jomosom, a village high in the Himalaya

A member of a Unitarian Universalist community in New York City, Gary Jacinto incorporates elements of Buddhism in his spiritual practice.

growing quickly into a town. We were three: Sharon, my sister, an experienced backpacker; Binod, our Nepalese guide/porter; and me, a New Yorker whose back had not felt a pack for twenty-five years. The trail was not immediately apparent, then I saw the rock stairs winding through the forest up the mountain. Peaceful, beautiful to the eye, they invited the traveler to pass this way. We began.

Within minutes my heart beat in my ears, breath came in gasps, my neck stiffened and my back ached. The pack seemed to gain weight as I stumbled from one step to another, all sense of coordination left below on the Chinese road.

A half hour later I came upon Sharon and Binod sitting on a rock, talking, waiting for me. I was in a panic, my mind a calliope of horrors. I doubted my ability to finish the trek and agonized about the damage I was doing to my already compromised health. When I regained my breath and a normal heartbeat Sharon said, "To climb a mountain is to discover your own pace, and simply move. Just listen; your body will tell you everything."

* * * * *

When my eyes opened the next morning, I saw sunlight sneaking between rocks resting on a lattice of wood which made up the guest house roof. After breakfast we packed and started our second day of walking. Far in the distance, capped in white, we saw the Himalayan peaks which formed the gateway to the Annapurna Sanctuary.

The trail was quite different from that of the infamous stairs. It was now a path, winding its way through terraced farms, forest and meadows, gently dipping here and there in its climb up the mountain. At one point, and quite suddenly, the path became a walkway of dressed stone—

carefully placed and shaped flat fieldstone. There was a formality, a deliberateness about it as it graciously swept across the meadow into the woods beyond.

There was something strange about this path. It was out of place, as if it were not in its proper time. I felt as though I had walked this way before and then almost swooned with the shock of memory it rekindled from my youth.

The day was my graduation from junior high school thirty-six years earlier. I had entered William Land Park walking next to the carefully placed and shaped fieldstone curb. Excited and filled with the moment, I felt that all things seemed possible.

I stood transfixed on the stone walkway curving through that Nepalese meadow and in the blink of my



John Post/Mira

eye saw the transformation of that young man to middle age. I experienced the loss of an innocence as it swept across my memory—an innocence which slipped away from me like the air slowly leaking from a poorly tied balloon—a loss which helped create the man who now stands under the straw Bermuda Crusher shading him from the brightness of this Nepalese morning. I felt the loss of hope and all the disappointments of those intervening years and understood the resignation that crept insidiously and slowly into my life. I also felt the pain, the desperation which now propelled me in my struggle with my AIDS. Fear had crept slowly into my life. It was not a fear of something, but rather a fear through which I experienced everything—so pervasive I did not even know it was there. It separated me from life and creation itself.

Only a second or two had gone by as I paused on the fieldstone path looking across the meadow this Nepalese morning. In the catharsis of those few seconds the accumulated fear of decades dissipated. The memories passed and were replaced by the exhilaration of possibility of that young man standing in that park thirty-six years earlier. I was innocently happy, filled with life. In this epiphany all things again became possible. A spiritual journey had begun.

* * * * *

The Moonlight Guest House at Landruk was situated below the crest of the ridge we had spent the last five hours crossing. As the woman who took my order for pumpkin pudding was in her garden seeking the pumpkin, I looked up to the gateway of the sanctuary which was now one day closer and I knew I would complete this journey. I was discovering my pace, a slow and easy gait which propelled me with minimum effort, and as I walked there was an increasing awareness—like a

memory, an echo gently present—an awareness of being a part of something other than myself.

The clouds rushed up the valley to nestle among the Himalayan peaks as the woman discarded the seeds and began peeling the pumpkin. We were her only guests. She chopped the yellow pulp in small pieces, and with milk and sugar, slowly cooked the mixture over her wood fire. With the patience of one who knows no time she stirred the ingredients in the pot. The sun had cast long shadows up the river valley before her recipe was complete. Its rays brushed the snow white peaks a pale orange as I ate her pumpkin pudding; my gaze went back and forth from bowl to mountain.

* * * * *

Walking slower than Sharon and Binod, I was alone much of the time. Alone with this whispered echo calling me from my unconscious, a whisper evolving itself into consciousness. I found myself thanking trees for their roots which provided staircases on the steep trails. Literally saying, "Thank you, tree, for helping me." And to my walking stick, "Thank you, bamboo, for being my walking stick." The kind of stuff that on the streets of New York would get me a bed in Bellevue, but here in Nepal where the greeting *Namaste* means "I greet the divinity within you," my acknowledgements were both natural and profound.

I gained increasing appreciation of the moment—the texture of the path under my foot, the myriad colors in the bark of the rhododendron tree, the subtlety of taste in the simplest of foods. My perception of separation dis-

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solved; no duality, only the moment. I came to understand that the whisper in my ear was my memory of my Divine creation, a calling myself back to my true nature.

We walked six more days—traversing ridges, down to river valleys, up and around again, only to find another valley, another river we needed to cross. I was an unstoppable machine. The forest gave way to bamboo. Wet, tropical, the trail sometimes became like a small stream. We climbed above the tree line, and when we stopped on the fifth night we were in the sanctuary, a few hours from our destination.

The climb the next day was through a gently sloping meadow of yellow grass 15,000 feet in the Himalaya. The milky-blue water of a glacial stream flowed under a thin layer of ice, occasionally gurgling through. We were surrounded by some of the world's highest peaks. Excited, I walked up the meadow path; my breath came in increasingly short gasps in the thin air.

That night I lay awake and listened to the thunder of chunks of ice the size of railroad boxcars falling off the glacier next to our guest house. I got up, bundled in my down jacket against the cold, and walked outside. The clouds had disappeared to reveal a canopy of night sky a twinkle with what seemed a million stars. I stood gazing at the snow covered mountains in the light of an almost full moon and was filled with a sense of accomplishment. I had made it, done this thing, this adventure that some said I should not and could not do. The journey began in spite of my AIDS, but here in the sanctuary I knew it was accomplished with my AIDS as a companion. In my return to an innocence, I not only made peace with my fellow traveler but also discovered myself—a traveler in the arms of a Divine creator.

Breaking Up Unplowed Ground



Joyce Davidson

In *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis traces the beginning of his long spiritual journey to the death of his mother when he was a child. He equates joy, "an unsatisfied desire which is more desirable than any other satisfaction," with grief, and describes a moment of epiphany as a young man when the memory of "joy that I had once had and now lacked for years" allowed him to "return from exile and desert lands to my own country."

The death of my mother and my deep grief started me on a renewed search for meaning.

I was a "PK," the universally recognized (at least in my universe) abbreviation for preacher's kid. That was the term that most defined me as a child. My father was a minister in a fundamentalist denomination; my mother was the quintessential preacher's wife—and beyond. She was so totally devoted to their ministry that I believe if she had been born a generation later she would have joined the clergy herself. Years later, in trying to explain

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my childhood, I told friends that it was like being raised by a priest and a nun. We ate, slept, and breathed the church.

But it didn't work for me. As a child, and certainly as an adolescent, I began to doubt and feel left out. I couldn't swallow it, and I couldn't admit it, and I was scared to death that I might be wrong. I was terrified of dying. I sat in the back on long car trips bargaining with God (just in case) to spare my life so that I could have another chance to believe in Him. If my mother wasn't home when I returned from school, I was afraid that the rapture had occurred and I alone was left. Every sermon convicted me.

As a young adult I fled all that and decided that I was probably agnostic because I wasn't sure of anything. But I wasn't happy about that either. Everyone I grew up around had answers except me, and I was unsettled and still frightened, though a little smug.

After becoming a mother I tried any number of denominations, hoping to bestow on my children a positive, viable faith that had eluded me. But of course that hardly ever works. When my son was four, he informed me accusingly, "You're the only mother who doesn't believe in God!" And when my daughter was about seven, we drove by a church that we had briefly attended when she was in pre-school, and she asked, "We used to go there, right? How many churches don't we go to, Mom?"

During all this time my mother was in the throes of early-onset Alzheimer's. She lived with the disease for well over twenty years. She was so humiliated that she once told me that she wished suicide were not a sin that would doom her to hell. She had been bright, inquisitive, lively, complex, fiercely proud, and often fearsome. We could never fool her; she was the canniest person I have ever

known. I don't remember a word she couldn't spell or a literary work she hadn't heard of; whenever she sat down for any length of time she had a book in her hand.

We lost her, a piece at a time, over many years. Her keen mind dissolved into confusion then fear, her flashing dark eyes dulled, and finally the essence of this woman disappeared completely. When she first went into the nursing home, I sat with her for hours, although she no longer knew who I was. Once, she looked around the room with bewilderment and said, "I've lost . . . I've lost . . ." "What have you lost, Mother?" She looked me in the eye and said, "Well, just about everything."

As a child I used to run to keep up with her in the department store, because she shopped the way she did everything—on a dead run. Now she endlessly wandered the halls of the nursing home, unable to return to her room because she had no idea that she had a room. She had no idea, period.

If I believed in God I would have asked how it happened that a woman who had devoted her life to God should go on like this year after year. My family prayed, and I hoped for her death. We expected to feel a sense of relief when she was released from this nightmare.

What we didn't expect was that she would be beaten to death by another nursing home resident. She lived in pain, struggling for breath, for twelve days. In the casket her lips were sewn shut because her jaw was shattered, her broken nose was frightfully crooked, and the heavy mortuary makeup couldn't obscure the deep bruises all over her face.

*My grief
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And so there was no relief. My grief was too massive for me to find a place to put it. It was a physically heavy thing. It was not that I missed her presence; I had long ago said good-bye to the woman who was my mother. It was that I couldn't bear the unspeakable circumstances of her death.

Then I began to process it the way I always have dealt with a problem or crisis: I went to the library. I knew what my mother had gone through before she died: I wanted to know what had happened to her afterwards. I checked out every book I could find about the near-death experience, not really knowing what to expect in either the books or my reaction to them.

I reflected on the last twenty years of her life and contrasted them with her release from the tyranny of her body and the possibility of her having been surrounded by the intense glow of unconditional love and joy. I came to believe that if she had been given the choice, if someone had said, "You can go on the way you are, or you can go through a painful, terrifying experience and be released from this," she would have chosen the beating. And I found tremendous solace in that.

But here's the really unexpected part. Without realizing that it was happening, I found myself more open to a broad spectrum of thoughts and feelings that require faith—a faith I never had, not even as a child. Not my parents' faith, but my own. My paradigm was shifting and no one was more surprised than I.

I began to "break up unplowed ground." I embraced the "adventure in openness to a multi-dimensional reality" of which Ernest Becker spoke in his book, *The Denial of Death*. I don't know where this road leads, but I am confident that it is the right road. Most of all, though, I

have been released from the gripping terror.

For many years I found myself on the outside of a wall, on the inside of which were people of faith. They had come there from all directions and through many different doors, but they all had faith in common . . . and that eluded me. I was Soren Kierkegaard's "cultural man," existing in a state where, as Jeffrey Kauffman, author of *Awareness of Mortality*, says, "We trace our fears and loves and hates, our night terrors and joyous daybreaks, our truths and lies, objective reality, natural science and gods, back to our own self."

Henri Nouwen has said that when we can face death with hope we can live life with generosity, and Albert Einstein said, "The greatest experience we can have is the mysterious."

It is possible that if my mother had simply continued to deteriorate and had died of natural causes, I would not have reached the brink of oblivion that is also the brink of infinity. I might never have discovered the faith Nouwen discusses that annihilates dread, continually developing itself out of the death throes of dread. The nature of her death and my response to it provided a doorway through the wall that I had walked alongside all my life. It was, perhaps, her final gift to me.

PEARLS OF WISDOM



FROM OUR RECENT INTERVIEWS

"I love the story of the rabbi who sent his disciple to learn from a fellow rabbi. When asked what he should learn, what parts of Torah, he teacher answered: 'I am sending you to learn from him—not words of Torah, but how he ties his shoelaces!' It's the details, the small daily things which we learn from our role models, not necessarily book knowledge which we can glean for our own lives."

Dov Peretz Elkins, Rabbi of the Jewish Center of Princeton. From "Hasidic Wisdom for the Heart and Soul," Vol. 47, No. 5, October 1996.

"Prayer is listening to that voice—to the one who calls you the beloved. It is to constantly go back to the truth of who we are and claim it for ourselves. I'm not what I do. I'm not what people say about me. I'm not what I have. My life is not rooted in the world, the things the world gives me. My life is rooted in my spiritual identity. Whatever we do—we have to go back regularly to that place of core identity."

Henri Nouwen, Catholic priest and prolific author of spiritual books. From "Parting Gifts," Vol. 47, No. 6, December 1996.

"What is sacred about all of our lives, even those of us who would never dream of using such a word for it, is that God speaks to us through what happens to us in them—even through such unpromising events as walking up the road to get the mail out of the mail box, maybe, or seeing something in the TV news that brings you up short, or laughing yourself silly with a friend. If skeptics ask to be shown an instance of God speaking to them in *their* lives, I suggest that they pay clos-

est attention to the next time, when, for unaccountable reasons, they find tears in their eyes."

Frederick Buechner, author of The Sacred Journey. From "The Sacred Journey," Vol. 48, No. 5, October 1997.

"For many years I would make a light in my heart while in meditation. I did variations on this, too. I would go and sit in the sunlight and imagine myself surrounded by sunlight. . . . I made the image of light in my heart as an image of God's love. The only way I can describe what happened is that it stopped being an image. Something asserted itself through that image as if it were love."

Robert Corin Morris, Episcopal priest and founder of Interweave: a community learning center in Summit, NJ. From "A Light in My Heart," Vol. 48, No. 6, December 1997.

"When I was about thirteen, I had a truly mystical experience. I went out onto a balcony and looked around and I remember seeing a monk. He was standing under a sycamore tree, and the evening sun was shining down on the tree, casting long shadows over the meadow that went down to the river, and then something happened that was probably my first sense of the Spirit and the connectedness to that inner dimension. I became the monk and the tree and the field and the sun and it was almost like I could feel the fire flowing between us."

Danny Martin, President of International Community for the Renewal of the Earth. From "Belonging and Longing," Vol. 49, No. 2, April 1998.

"Stories are our way of seeing below the surface, beyond the facts of life to the meaning of life and beyond the meaning of life to the source of life. This is why almost all the religions have done their teachings in terms of parables and stories. They are bridges to the unseen, and as such, they move us toward our wholeness. They remind us of who we are, why we are here, and that we are not alone."

Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., author of Kitchen Table Wisdom. From "Below the Surface," Vol. 50, No. 1, February 1999.

"I am a rabbi but I often go to Mass. I sit there and I try to understand and to discover the numinous, the unique experience of God in that liturgical exercise. I think trying to understand the spirituality of the other person of faith is a very important step forward."

Leon Klenicki, Rabbi and Director of the Department of Interfaith Affairs of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. From "Witnessing Together," Vol. 50, No. 2, April 1999.

"Fasting confronts you three times a day. . . . It reminds you that there are so many immediate desires within us, desires you never question that keep us baffled and dimmed as to the presence of God. As we burn through those, we begin to see God more clearly."

Frederica Mathewes-Green, author of Facing East. From "Facing East: A Journey into Eastern Orthodoxy," Vol. 50, No. 3, June 1999.

"I understand the Hebrew concept of forgiveness that means to drop it, to let it go. I want people to know that forgiveness, to let pain or anger go, is for their benefit. To hold on to these negative events and feelings literally puts spiritual toxins into your body. . . . I describe forgiveness by reversing the words: Giving forth. Giving forth positive energy in the name of blessing instead of giving forth negative energy in the form of cursing is forgiveness."

Ron Roth, author of Prayer and the Five Stages of Healing. From "Healing into Wholeness," Vol. 50, No. 4, August 1999.

"I am suggesting that ritual play a part of celebrating the transformation moments of the universe itself. . . . For instance when day passes into night—this is one of the most sacred moments in the diurnal liturgy of the universe. These are the mystical moments in the daily cycle."

Thomas Berry, author of Earth Story, Sacred Story. From "The Old/New Cosmic Story," by Thomas Rain Crowe, Vol. 50, No. 5, October 1999.

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